

# Soil Sourcing & Selection

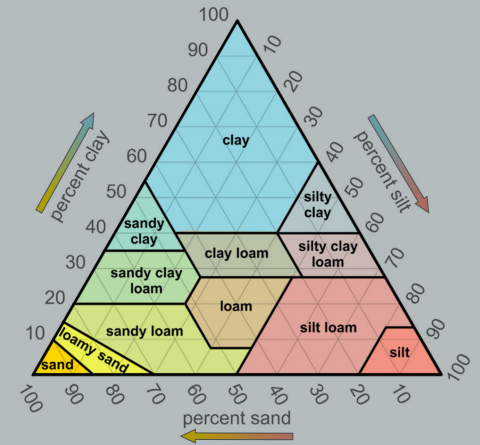
Note: These recommendations are for Naturescaping (not veggie gardening).  
In general, your goal is to mimic local native soils.

## General Information

**Soil Texture** - most providers will try to provide soil that's categorized as "loam", or the more free-draining "sandy loam". You'll want to limit clay to 15-20% max, sand 40-70% max, and OM (organic matter) should be 3-5%.

Before doing your own research, check with these groups to see if they have recommendations from experience:

- Trusted gardening friends
- Local conservation district
- WSU master gardeners
- Trusted landscape professionals



## Doing your own soil sourcing research

### Step 1 -- Research blends on websites

The local supplier might have detailed information on their soil blends (real data is a good indication of quality products). More likely, you'll encounter something cryptic like "the types of soils vary in variability throughout the year".

### Step 2 -- Ask questions

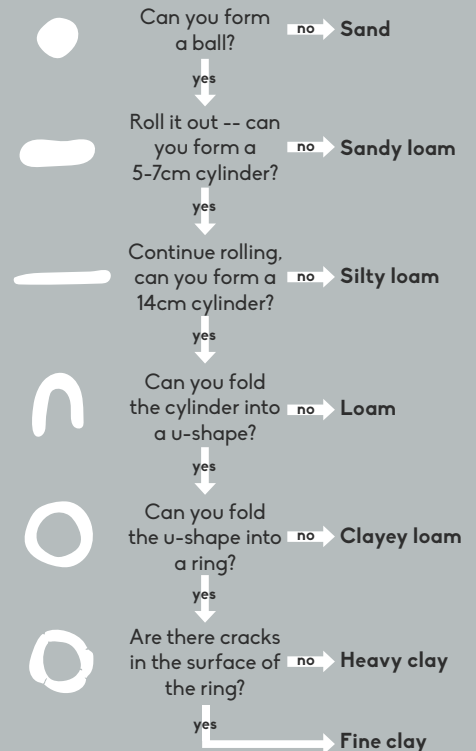
- How is the soil screened? You don't want to pay for rocks, garbage, or weeds
- What are the relative % of sand, silt, clay (they might not know, then field trip)
- What % of OM
- Do they test compost for Clopyralid and Aminopyralid (pesticide) residue?
- What is the origin of their OM? The ideal is yard and food waste, not manures or mushroom compost which are more likely to have herbicide residue and might be too high in nutrients for naturescaping and water-wise planting.

### Step 3 -- Take a trip to the facility

- How is the soil stored? Are there any likely or visible contamination (e.g. weeds colonizing the soil bin)
- Inspect the products -- look for obvious rocks, garbage, or weeds
- Feel the soil and analyze with the hand-texture method (described on the right)
- Feel/smell the soil -- it should be dark in color, crumbly, and loose-feeling. You shouldn't see any uncomposted bark, it should be seamlessly blended, and the only smell should be rich earth (no sour, sweet, or ammonia-like)

## Hand Texture Test

There are several methods to test soil texture by hand, but here's a simplified version using shapes of moistened soil.



## Compost selection

**Home compost** doesn't usually generally enough for naturescaping compost -- it's worth keeping this for veggie beds.

**Yard waste compost** is best -- manures might be too high in nutrients for native and water-wise landscaping, and likelier to have persistent pesticides. **Bark or sawdust** could lead to shortages of nutrients.

### When selecting compost, look for:

- Clean earthy smell -- not ammonia, sweet, or sour
- Crumbly with mixed sizes of particles, but no big sticks
- Stable temperature, not hot (it could be warm -- hot indicates it's not done decomposing)
- Should be screened
- A reputable compost supplier can provide lab reports on specs, germination rates, and more